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## Le "Quadripartitum numerorum." Jean de Murs

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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Le "Quadripartitum numerorum." by Jean de Murs

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To preserve the manse, which was indivisible in law through the twelfth century in Picardy, lords had to control peasants' marriages and permit only modes of inheritance favoring one successor—primogeniture, ultimogeniture, or the surviving spouse's inheriting all. When arbitrary reliefs were ended in the late twelfth century, tenants were able to pass their lands directly to heirs without going through the lord. In what is perhaps the most tenuously argued section of the book, Jacob—ignoring the strong family consciousness of the city elites of the thirteenth century—suggests that with the decline of arbitrary relief, the city governments assumed the lords' previous position as the collectors of heavy *tailles*, which dispersed family assets. As these levies yielded to indirect taxes in the fourteenth century, accumulation of property by lineages was again favored at precisely the time when the extended families were gaining economic and legal power at the expense of the conjugal unit.

Jacob's ignorance of David Herlihy's work is painfully apparent, and he also seems unaware of recent work in Dutch and English on family structures in Germanic Flanders. He seems oblivious to the logical flaws in his claims of a unitary custom of "commoners" that transcends the urban-rural typology. Douai is clearly an exceptional case. This book is impressively documented and is a welcome contribution to the growing recognition of the importance of legal regimes in establishing relations between the sexes and between family groups however defined. Its application, however, will remain regional.

DAVID NICHOLAS, Clemson University

JEAN DE MURS, *Le "Quadripartitum numerorum,"* ed. Ghislaine l'Huillier. (Mémoires et Documents, 32.) Geneva: Droz, 1990. Paper. Pp. 661.

This work is the published version of a thesis that was submitted to the Ecole des Chartes in Paris in 1979 and is first and foremost an edition of the *Quadripartitum numerorum* of Jean de Murs. Although it is the first printed edition of the work, Mme l'Huillier is not the first to have embarked on such an enterprise, for in the fifteenth century no less a scholar than Regiomontanus laid plans, abortive as it turned out, to publish the work from Nuremberg. Still more recently A. Nagel (1889) and L. C. Karpinski (1912–13) have printed important excerpts from it—with mixed success. Karpinski painted a trite picture of a plagiarist, a mere collector of other scholars' thoughts. Within the last two decades it has become clear that Jean de Murs was a man of some originality, in particular in astronomical affairs. The editor of this new publication continues the modest rehabilitation of this fourteenth-century scholar and through her brief introduction, and numerous annotations to the text, shows that Karpinski's assessment was mistaken on many points of detail.

Jean de Murs was from the diocese of Lisieux (Normandy) and was intellectually active for at least a quarter of a century, say from 1317 to 1345 or later. In 1344, with Firmin of Belval, he was invited to Avignon by Pope Clement VI to advise on calendar reform. By that time he had been for some years in the employ of Philippe III of Navarre, but most of his scientific writing had been done still earlier, while he was at the Sorbonne (M.A. before 1321). He wrote a number of relatively advanced works relating to the quadrivium: several on music, for example, and a number of minor tracts on the mathematical aspects of astronomy (that is, mostly spherical trigonometry). In geometry he wrote a short treatise on squaring the circle, and a much longer work on mensuration, but his most renowned mathematical work was the *Quadripartitum numerorum*.

This is dated 13 November 1343. In four parts, as its title suggests, it is prefaced by a long versified address to Philippe de Vitry, poet, musician, and later bishop of Meaux. This speaks of the superiority of mathematics as a discipline and has much on the ex-

traction of rational and irrational roots, the manipulation of fractions, powers, and roots, and the solution of a limited number of quadratic and simultaneous equations. There are also a series of questions and a substantial intermezzo ("semiliber") between books 3 and 4 and another verse letter.

Book 1 is a short treatise on "speculative arithmetic," based partly on a treatise of that name by Boethius and partly on Euclid's *Elements*. Book 2 concerns the basic operations of arithmetic, including fractions, and book 3 the theory of proportions and its (verbal-) algebraic expression. Speaking generally, the greatest influence here is from the treatise of al-Khwārizmī. Jean had evidently completed book 3 when he first came across the *Liber abaci* of the greatest medieval European mathematician, Leonardo of Pisa. His *questiones* and *semiliber*, as well as book 4, show signs of strong influence from that quarter. In letter 4 of the introductory verses there is a mysterious reference to an equation not found in the main text but now known to be found in the algebra of Abū Kāmil.

Without reference to his sources it would have been difficult to see why Jean de Murs gave his work the structure it now possesses. It is a competent, not outstanding, piece of synoptic writing, but it does not present a particularly important stage in the development of mathematical ideas. By our standards, Jean simply failed to develop his sources; he also failed to integrate them effectively, with the result that his *Quadripartitum* seems to us to have very little overall structure. Of course it is easy for us to make such a judgment, and perhaps our standards are too severe, for by means of our easy algebraic notation we can see at a glance didactic patterns that would have been much more difficult to grasp by those obliged to present their results in purely verbal forms. However, even admitting that overall structure is harder to impose the greater the number of sources, an eclectic work should have more structure *within* its borrowed sections than does this.

As a textbook that influenced a number of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century scholars who in turn materially affected the advance of algebra and arithmetic, it was of great importance, and we can only be grateful to Mme l'Huillier for making it available. She does not have much to say about the history of mathematics generally, but her edition is laid out in an exemplary way. The care with which it is prepared does not always extend to the spelling of English words and names, but this is not unusual in French works and is of no great consequence—if only she had referred less often to the "*Dictionary of Scientific Biography*"!

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LEONARD W. JOHNSON, *Poets as Players: Theme and Variation in Late Medieval French Poetry*.

Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990. Pp. xiii, 357. \$37.50.

The central focus of this book is French poetry of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, including lyric compositions in the *formes fixes*, *dits*, and other didactic and debate poetry, often of mixed versification. The corpus studied is extremely varied, comprising texts in the "courtly love" tradition as well as political, moral, religious, and obscene verse. The principal authors treated are Guillaume de Machaut, Christine de Pizan, Alain Chartier, Jean Meschinot, and Jean Molinet. Johnson also touches on other authors of the period, such as Villon; and the chapter on bawdy verse includes some anonymous texts. Johnson additionally makes periodic references to sixteenth-century poets, largely for the purpose of demonstrating the continuity of the French poetic tradition in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries.

A major theme of Johnson's book is the respective role of innovation and convention in the poetic tradition he presents. French poetry of the later Middle Ages can be difficult for the modern reader to appreciate: Johnson cites a range of nineteenth- and twentieth-